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ABSTRACT

Administrators from local school districts in the southwest were consulted on three issues regarding the operational aspects of staff development. First, an effort was made to ascertain the conditions determining whether staff development programs are mandatory or voluntary. While staff development for administrative personnel is normally mandatory, several factors work against mandatory staff development for teachers. The second issue discussed was the relationship between staff development and staff planning. Formal staff planning occurs most often in secondary schools, where teachers are organized by department, but rarely in elementary schools, or between elementary and secondary teachers. The third issue discussed was long- and short-term procedures for evaluating or guiding staff development as a district effort. These include daily "feedback" activities and subsequent followup. Staff development and planning are shaped primarily by the mechanics of finding or buying time when teachers are not in the classroom. (TE)

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WHAT ADMINISTRATORS SAY ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND STAFF PLANNING

Aaron Buchanan and Patricia Bachelor

ABSTRACT

Local school districts were consulted regarding three matters:
conditions determining whether staff development programs are mandatory
or voluntary; the relationship between staff development and staff
planning; and procedures used for evaluating or guiding staff development
as a district effort.

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WHAT ADMINISTRATORS SAY ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND STAFF PLANNING

Aaron Buchanan and Patricia Bachelor

As previously reported,¹ administrators in SWRL's region indicate that staff development, as it has evolved through a period of unprecedented extension in the reach of schooling to all levels of American society in the 1960's and 70's, has become, more than anything else, a supplement to formal teacher education programs provided by colleges and universities conducted on site in local school districts and independent schools. With certain exceptions, staff development sessions are compressed in time--they rarely extend more than two or three days; they are fairly narrow in their focus, compared to a standard three-credit course at a college or university, and they are aimed at improving personal/professional skills of individual teachers.

The telephone conversations that yielded these findings provided consistent and coherent information. Yet, some aspects of staff development did not arise in the conversations. Most kinds of staff development described to us sounded as if they involved voluntary participation by teachers, but we couldn't be sure whether or not that meant that very little staff development is mandatory. Perhaps administrators had just not mentioned mandatory staff development sessions, possibly because mandatory sessions dealt with more mundane

¹Buchanan, Aaron, and Bachelor, Patricia. Staff Development, Better Teaching, and School Improvement. Technical Note No. 2-80/08. SWRL Educational Research and Development, May 27, 1983.

matters of schooling. The information from our telephone conversations didn't provide that information. Moreover, we had asked administrators to talk specifically about "staff development."² Later on, in preparing our report, it occurred to us that local school districts may engage in some kinds of formal staff planning, where groups of teachers having responsibilities that are more or less in common, come together to improve the quality of teaching as an aggregated school effort. We thought it possible that this kind of planning might be a more routine function of schooling, even though it might be formal, and that school administrators in charge of staff development might be involved in it only indirectly. If these circumstances were true, then, we reasoned, formal work in staff planning might have slipped through the cracks of our earlier information.

To find out more about these aspects of staff development, we arranged to visit on site with several of the administrators who had earlier been interviewed by telephone. Each of our on-site conversations about staff development lasted anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour and a half. We talked about operational aspects of staff development, specifically with regard to three issues:

- (1) mandatory versus voluntary staff development
- (2) staff development versus staff planning
- (3) short-term feedback versus long-term management

²We did ask administrators to contrast "staff development" with "inservice," if there were any meaningful distinction to be made in the scope of their local activities. In almost all cases, the distinctions were minimal and not very consistent from one administrator to another.

The administrators came from quite different backgrounds and often held quite different positions within the district organization. Some administrators, especially in very large districts, had responsibility only for staff development. Other administrators had additional responsibilities, and occasionally these responsibilities took precedence over staff development.

Mandatory versus Voluntary Staff Development

Our impression that almost all staff development is voluntary appears to be accurate. We were given few examples of staff development in regular school programs where participation was mandatory for all teachers in the district or even all teachers with common responsibilities. Start up sessions, prior to the opening of school in the fall, are often mandatory, but little else in the regular program is. The most extensive use of mandatory staff development occurs in conjunction with "categorical" programs that have special funding from the state or federal government. Often, programs for students who speak limited English, handicapped students, or gifted and talented students have some provision for mandatory staff development for all teachers who work in the program. Also, these programs tend to provide more funds to pay not only the instructors who provide staff development but teachers who participate, especially when their participation is required outside of the regular school day specified in their contracts.

We did find that principals, "department chairpersons," and other administrators are often required to participate in staff development. In fact, staff development and staff planning appear to be routinely

accepted as part of the job for personnel who are not full time classroom teachers. In this regard, school districts seem to take a "team" approach to school management much like similar approaches to management in business and industry. The similarities stop here because the role of classroom teachers is still quite unlike the role of "labor" in business and industry, although collective bargaining for and by teachers has pushed the relationship between classroom teachers and school administrators closer to a labor-management relationship.

Several factors appear to militate against mandatory staff development for teachers. Most of them have to do with the fact that almost all classroom teachers are hired to handle classroom responsibilities all day, every day. Finding time for staff development during the regular school day is difficult. There are ways to do it, but they don't provide a very large block of time, and they can be expensive. The state makes some provision for freeing up teachers using the mechanism of the minimum day when students go home early. How individual districts use the minimum day varies according to policies of the administration and the local school board. Some school boards take a position that time for teaching is best spent in providing classroom instruction, not in planning for it, and the use of the minimum day is severely restricted to as few as three or four per year. In fact, no one seems to be very comfortable in using minimum days. Because they are exceptions to the regular school day, minimum days inherently create extra work for school personnel, however they're handled. Administrators are cautious about them, because parents and the general public are easily moved to complain

whenever students are not in school. Obviously, parents must be informed whenever students are to be dismissed early, but some districts go so far as to explain the schedule of minimum days to parent/teacher groups in advance and to notify local merchants. There are also some provisions for a very small number of instruction-free days, when students don't come to school at all, but administrators we talked with are extremely cautious about how to use them. Some don't use them these days at all.

Some districts, but not all, reserve some time at the end of the regular school day when they can schedule staff meetings and, occasionally some staff development. This time is usually specified in teachers' contracts as part of the official school day that extends beyond dismissal of students in the afternoon. The trouble is that the end of the contracted day seldom has very much time in it. Usually it's no more than an extra 30 to 45 minutes and is only appropriate for occasional staff meetings. Using this time on a regular basis for something as extensive as staff development would undoubtedly raise the level of dissatisfaction among teachers, even when the time is set aside in union contract agreements.

The only other way to get time for staff development is to buy it, either by hiring substitute teachers for time needed during the regular school day or by giving teachers extra pay. Either way, the cost for mandatory staff development of much scope or substance is high. Even where money is available to pay for them, mandatory meetings of any kind for teachers are used with great care by administrators. Some teachers

are sensitive about most anything that requires their attendance. Administrators feel that mandatory sessions are often wasted on some teachers and, worse yet, invite criticism for what might otherwise be a very successful presentation. In fact, public opinion is "set" in such a way that staff development of any sort, mandatory or voluntary, is always vulnerable to critics who contend that time would be better spent by teachers in class with students.

Staff Development versus Staff Planning

Is there a lot of organized staff planning that goes on independently or in conjunction with organized staff development? Not really. There are examples here and there where teachers get together to select a textbook or go over the installation of a new program, but organized planning by teaching staff appears to be irregular. The reasons seem to be most of the same ones that constrain mandatory staff development-- finding time in the regular school day and overcoming objections of a small number of teachers who would rather not participate. In the past, school administrators have often been able to use state or federal regulations that often accompany specially funded programs as a rationale to get teachers to go along with collaborative staff planning or mandatory staff development. Finding time is still a problem in special programs, but it is often minimized by the fact that these programs frequently provide paraprofessional teacher aides who can "cover" a certain amount of classroom activity and thereby release teachers for more executive work outside the classroom.

Where staff planning does occur, it often involves most classroom teachers somewhere near the end of the planning cycle. For one thing, formal staff planning is most likely to occur in secondary schools, where teachers are organized by department. Often, a department chairperson together with one or two interested teachers are released from some classroom responsibilities to work out planning details. Teachers are brought in when things are mostly completed to learn how new plans are supposed to be carried out. Bringing in teachers at this point also helps to build support for the end result of the planning process. Most often, the end result is part or all of a new program. It can be a new set of objectives for instruction in a particular area of subject matter, new guidelines for grading student work, or new additions to a set of courses.

What is apparently rare these days is organized planning by teachers across grade levels in elementary schools. Even rarer is staff planning among elementary and secondary teachers. It appears that teachers at all levels put forth a great deal of effort with students at "their" level, but they don't have a clear picture of how grade-by-grade instruction brought students to a particular point in their progress through elementary and secondary school, and they don't see where it is supposed to take them next. In other words, what used to be called "articulation" across grade levels seems now to be in a fairly tenuous state. Administrators agree that more work of this kind needs to be set in place on a much broader front, but they are frustrated by what they see as slim possibilities for making substantial increases in the amount of staff planning they are able to carry out now.

Short-term Feedback versus Long-term Management

We were interested to learn how administrators went about evaluating staff development sessions in contrast to managing the enterprise over an extended period of time. What we found is consistent with our earlier impression that staff development in local school districts consists mainly of workshop-like presentations intended to supplement the personal/professional skills of individual teachers. Most of the administrators we talked with seemed a little self conscious about evaluation and somewhat frustrated that they were unable to do more. However, the concern focused on the staff development activities separately rather than as a set. Some talked of "changes in teacher behavior" as the ultimate criterion for staff development--an outcome that is enormously difficult to determine, let alone to direct.

It is safe to say that almost all staff development is subjected to daily "feedback" activities where participants complete some kind of paper and pencil survey at the end of each staff development session. The forms for this kind of survey vary from district to district. Some involve simple direct questions about the quality of the staff development presentation as well as prospects for its usefulness in the classroom. Others embed questions about quality of presentation in some form of rating scale. In one way or another, this kind of evaluation is intended to elicit responses from participants. These responses are partly for the benefit of administrators who organized the staff development sessions and instructors who actually gave the presentation. But partly evaluation is for the benefit of the participants, themselves,

to define the experience in which they are participating and to permit them to react to it as it unfolds or is completed.

Some types of staff development have some "follow up" built-in, especially those where teachers are being observed for the purpose of making them aware of their own teaching technique--ostensibly with the idea of making improvements. Otherwise, extensive "follow up" of staff development seems unlikely to occur. Whatever the form and scope, this orientation is mainly to evaluate and modify the parts of district staff development program rather than to adjust the staff development program per se.

Summary

All things considered, staff development and staff planning appear to be shaped by the mechanics of either finding or buying time when teachers are not in the classroom. Very little staff development is mandatory, because it is difficult to arrange and often very expensive to carry out. Moreover, voluntary staff development is compatible with the still-emerging consideration of staff development as a matter for collective bargaining.

Some changes do appear in the wind. For one thing, staff development is becoming more and more a formal part of the administrative organization of schools. The number of administrators whose primary responsibility is staff development is increasing. In addition, the staff development office in many districts is responsible for non-teaching staff, such as maintenance personnel and secretaries, as well as teachers and principals. Not so long ago, staff development was an

adjunct to classroom instruction concerned almost entirely with improving skills of teachers. These days, it is not unlikely to find staff development affiliated more with the personnel division of a larger district than with the instruction division, even though the lion's share of the service goes to teachers. What will be interesting in the future is to see whether staff development for teachers will continue to look like mini courses organized around single topics or whether school administrators will take greater advantage of staff development as a tool for "moving" district programs.